

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses the background of the study, statement of the problems, purposes of the study, significance of the study, scope and limitation, and lastly the definition of the key terms.

1.1 Background of the Study

Vocabulary, or simply put the knowledge of words of a language, is just as important as the four basic skills like listening, reading, speaking and writing. It is basically an essential factor to be capable of using any language, for example English. Suppose that we have little to no English vocabulary at all, it will be scarcely possible to deliver whatever intended message we would like others to understand through our communication using this language. Vocabulary knowledge also relates to academic performance. According to Lemmouh (2010), based on their course grades, students' academic performance has a moderate relationship with their lexical richness. The performance includes reading comprehension, as stated by Rahim (2015) that somebody's level of vocabulary knowledge is one of several factors that play an impacting role in determining their performance in reading comprehension. In fact, there will be difficulties that ensue if the students lack vocabulary.

There are troubles that arise when students lack lexical richness. According to Hiebert and Kamil (2005), it will be harder for students to comprehend the text's content if the words knowledge they already have is insufficient to make them figure out the meaning of words they have yet known. This will not only

affect the students' performance in their learning process, but also the ones who would teach them Reading Comprehension. For once, designing language learning programmes for the students will be more difficult, so is selecting texts for students' learning materials (Nation & Nguyen, 2011: 86-87). Such problems arise because the difficulty of words, which is determined by one's breadth of vocabulary knowledge, determines the texts' difficulty (Stahl (2003) in Mehrpour et al, 2011: 103). One way to solve the problems is by finding out students' vocabulary size to predict the reading comprehension ability (Mehrpour et al., 2011: 103), which can be accomplished by administering Vocabulary Size Test.

Vocabulary Size Test is offered as one instance of the solution for aforementioned problems. This test which measures students' receptive vocabulary size is said to be essential in designing materials for students because the result helps us decide what level of text difficulty suits them and whether they are ready for reading materials that are not simplified (Nation & Nguyen, 2011). It has been researched and tested, so the practicality, reliability and validity are already proven (Golkar & Yamini, 2007; Beglar in Nation & Nguyen, 2011). Vocabulary Size Test measures one's total of vocabulary size (or also known as vocabulary breadth) with its test items that consist of words randomly picked from and thus represents 14 different levels of word frequency. Because Vocabulary Size Test is designed that way, we can interpret one's result as their state of vocabulary knowledge (Nation & Nguyen, 2011: 89) because the test's score is assumed to be reflect the test taker's knowledge about words (Gyllstad, 2013: 12). This is then assumed to make us have a more solid prediction on what level of

difficulty we want the materials to be; ideally not so easy but also not too difficult to fully provide their learning and keep them motivated.

The researcher would like to conduct this current study due to the previous statement by Hiebert & Kamil (2005) that says students will find it harder to comprehend a text if they have insufficient amount of vocabulary knowledge for figuring out unknown words' meaning, and the effect stretches as far as making it difficult for those who teach reading comprehension have difficulty in selecting texts for the students' learning material, and that guessing on their vocabulary knowledge can make other problem(s) pops out. With how well Vocabulary Size Test is viewed as a solution for such problems, the researcher would like to see if it can also be of help in predicting students' current level of vocabulary knowledge and if it also relates to their current reading comprehension performance; similar to previous researches below. The researcher would also like to explore the correlation between the vocabulary size and reading comprehension within the context of EFL students in ELED of UMM and further strengthen the notion about the two variables' correlation by the current findings.

A few studies on the correlation of vocabulary size and reading comprehension have been performed at different contexts; all are conducted by administering Vocabulary Size Test (VST) and Reading Comprehension (RC) section of TOEFL test to the test takers for the scores to be analyzed to see the correlation. Golkar and Yamini (2007) obtained the mean score for VST and RC to be 73.5 and 26.63, with $r = .75$. Anjomshoa and Zamanian (2014) obtained the mean scores 32.197 and 27.234 for VST and RC respectively ($r = .599$). Lastly,

Kezhen (2015) obtained the mean score 78.81 and 73.30 for VST and RC ($r = .60$). All of those research findings show a strong correlation between the students' vocabulary size and reading comprehension abilities that are represented by their tests' scores ($r > 0.5$). Those findings provide useful information for lecturers who teach those undergraduate students about their current level of vocabulary and reading comprehension capabilities.

The researcher performed a preliminary study by asking third semester students who are taking Intermediate Reading Comprehension as well. It was then found that while some students might feel the materials were just fine for them, there were also some who found the available reading materials were hard to understand; mostly vocabulary-wise. What these students said implied that their vocabulary size was insufficient to decode words in the materials. Therefore, the researcher generates statement of problems as follows.

1.2 Statement of the Problems

Based on the background of study above, the research problems are formulated as follows:

- 1 What is the vocabulary size of the students of English Language Education Department of UMM?
- 2 What is the correlation between the students' vocabulary size and their reading comprehension ability?

1.3 Hypothesis

Based on the research questions, the hypotheses are stated as follows:

H0: There is no correlation between the students' vocabulary size and reading comprehension ability.

H1: There is a correlation between the students' vocabulary size and reading comprehension ability.

1.4 Purposes of the Study

Following the statement of problems above, the purposes of this study are:

- 1 To find out the vocabulary size that the students of English Language Education Department have.
- 2 To see the correlation between the students' vocabulary size and their reading comprehension ability.

1.5 Scope and Limitation

The scope of this research is receptive vocabulary size test. It is a test of vocabularies that somebody could comprehend and recognize (usually through reading) even though they could not actively use it in speaking or writing. The limitation for this study is third semester students of English Language Education Department in UMM.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The results of this research, which are in the form of test scores and result of correlation analysis, will hopefully help the lecturers in designing materials suitable for the students' level of capabilities, all the while enhancing their

vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension ability without making them overwhelmed with vocabularies that are too difficult or become stagnant with vocabularies that are too easy. The researcher wants to help lecturers who teach reading comprehension in English Language Education Department by delivering them such information. By them knowing ELED students' vocabulary size, the lecturers can understand students' level of capability instead of presuming how it might be and, thus, provide the best, suitable learning materials for the students. The researcher also hopes that this research will give significance to other researchers who are also interested in Vocabulary Size Test and its relation to skills like reading comprehension in the form of new insightful data that complement previous studies.

1.7 Definition of the Key Terms

To avoid misunderstanding of the terms used in this study, the researcher provides some definition of the key terms as follows:

- 1 Vocabulary size is a measure of how many vocabularies a person knows in total (Meara & Wolter (2004) in Gyllstad (2013).
- 2 Vocabulary Size Test is a test that is designed to discover the test taker's vocabulary size (Nation & Nguyen, 2011: 89).
- 3 Reading comprehension is "the process of making meaning from text" to understand what is implied or described in said text (Woolley, 2011).